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Abstraction, Abstracted: Continuation of Russian Neonationalist Ideals in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*

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Abstraction, Abstracted: Continuation of Russian Neonationalist Ideals in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*

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Abstract

Abstraction, Abstracted: Continuation of Russian Neonationalist Ideals in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*

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Igor Stravinsky's 1927 opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* (with libretto by Jean Cocteau) contains quintessential Neoclassical qualities: it is a reduced, mechanical, and austere version of the Sophocles play, using older operatic devices within static harmonic momentum and ambiguous functionality. A closer look into the conception and intrinsic fabric of the work, however, betrays certain ideological bonds with the Russian neonationalist movement of the late 19th century. This movement had its origins in the visual arts but soon its principles carried over to music. The neonationalists valued the intrinsic properties of the folk subject (ornamentation in art, geometrical aspects of line, folk song) rather than the folk subject itself. In other words, the abstraction of the folk subject's innate qualities, rather than mere quotation, served as the means to a wholly modern artwork. Neonationalist ideals would serve as the catalyst for Stravinsky's modernist revolt in *Le Sacre du Printemps* (as explored by Richard Taruskin.) Although the movement itself is distanced from Stravinsky's Neoclassical period and *Oedipus Rex*,

its ideals can be traced from *Le Sacre* to *Oedipus* and beyond. In addition, the social and cultural milieu of Jean Cocteau in interwar France serves to position this work as distinctly modernist mainly through its abbreviation of the original source. In this study, I will explore the perpetuation of these ideals in *Oedipus* through its musical language and abstraction from sources to place it as an entirely new musical concept.

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> If *Oedipus* tempts one on first acquaintance to various analogies with the music of the past, it is because of a lingering tendency, contrary to the whole spirit of Stravinsky's art, to seek impressions in music which are evocative rather than direct.
> Roger Sessions, "On *Oedipus Rex*" (1928)

Introduction

Igor Stravinsky's 1927 opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex,* with the libretto written by Jean Cocteau, is most often called "neoclassical" in accordance with Stravinsky's second stylistic period (ca. 1920-ca.1951). Musically and textually, it is objective, mechanical, static, and austere—a truncated version of the original play by Sophocles in a musical-dramatic form. *Oedipus Rex* is neoclassical in that, being a distinctly modern adaptation of a Greek tragedy, it uses Baroque operatic devices but without the harmonic momentum characteristic of the period, making it an abstraction of past models. Exploring this idea of abstraction will lead to the deepest meaning of Stravinsky's *Oedipus*.

The idea of neoclassicism requires us to perceive how earlier and later works interact with one another. In this light, the Stravinsky-Cocteau adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* is a merging of sorts with the Sophoclean play of the long past. Moreover, it is a product of all past adaptations of the play (in Jean Cocteau's libretto) and Stravinsky's reabsorption of the European common musical element "reserve."[1] It is the manner in which Stravinsky absorbs and redistributes these elements, however, that calls for a deeper look into the work's neoclassical heritage. An essential part of the neoclassical aesthetic goes beyond the formal structure into the objective intrinsic quality of the work

[1] Roger Sessions, "On *Oedipus Rex,*" *Modern Music* 3 (March-April 1928): 15.

itself. It is in this aesthetic aspect that our understanding of the Stravinsky-Cocteau collaboration is elucidated in this study. In regard to the essence of past models rather than external borrowings, we can make a general link with the Russian neonationalist movement through a continuation of its ideals beyond its literal historical settings.

The neonationalist movement in Russia was an artistic movement in the late nineteenth century that placed aesthetic value on the intrinsic properties of Russian folk art (ornamentation, geometrical aspects of line, etc.) as opposed to the folk art subject itself. The approach of the neonationalists differentiated them from their predecessors—the use and abstraction of the folk art's innate qualities rather than an emulation or quotation of old subjects allowed the neonationalists a means to create a wholly *modern* Russian art. The realization of this distinctly modern art form by the abstraction of a folk art subject was the Modernist stamp of the movement. The neonationalist concept, then, is part and parcel of neoclassicism—namely the transformation of original sources into a more modern and abstract idiom. In addition to containing issues of genre and language, *Oedipus Rex* also contains internal musical aspects of layering, form, and style in general that are impacted by the convergence of modern European developments by Debussy, Ravel, Satie, and others. My intention is to examine *Oedipus Rex* through the lens of Stravinsky's own fragmented historico-cultural context as well as that of Jean Cocteau, the librettist, to reposition it as a continuation of Russian neonationalist ideals viewed through a distinctly French filter, making it entirely new. In order to do so, we must first return to late nineteenth-century Russia and France to review matters of art, music, theatre, and what was considered "modern."

The Development of Russian Neonationalism

Stravinsky grew up during the later period of the Mighty Five's dominance over the Russian musical world in the late nineteenth century and for the most part was a product of the nationalistic attitudes of his peer group.[2] The Mighty Five (or *Moguchaya Kuchka*[3]) were formed in the 1860s as a reaction to the musical "Germanism" of the Russian Musical Society and St. Petersburg Conservatory. Both of these institutions were founded by Anton Rubinstein who, although patriotic, called music a "German art" and said that "a deliberately national art…cannot claim universal sympathy," only ethnographical interest.[4] This led Mily Balakirev to found the Free Music School in 1862 as an alternative to the above institutions in order to cultivate what he considered a distinctly Russian musical agency—a return "to the Russian people" as opposed to freely incorporating musical practice from the West.

Balakirev's 1866 volume *Sbornik ruskikh narodnykh pesen* ("Collection of Russian Folk Songs"), consisting of forty arrangements of folk melodies collected along the Volga River, served as the point of reference for the harmonization practices utilized by *kuchkists* (and post-*kuchkists*) for the next 40-odd years, bringing a standardization to Russian nationalist music.[5] The Russian folk tunes, adapted as thematic material, were harmonized according to: 1) natural minor and/or Dorian mode ("Russian" minor); and 2)

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2 Richard Taruskin, "From Subject to Style: Stravinsky and the Painters," in *Confronting Stravinsky*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 21.

3 Translates as "Mighty Little Heap." In this way, the members are called *kuchkists*.

4 Richard Taruskin, "How the Acorn Took Root: A Tale of Russia," *19th Century Music* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 192.

5 Ibid., 198.

tonal "mutability"—an oscillation between two "tonics" with the second one being either (in common practice terms) the relative minor or major, or a step below the first one. It avoided the harmonic dominant and the harmonic minor with leading tone function altogether. By the time of Stravinsky's musical education and career beginnings after the turn of the century, Russian nationalist music had begun to sound generic and academic due to faithful use of these harmonization techniques. While music under the influence of the *kuchkists* became stylistically ossified and out of touch, visual artists had found a new, invigorating approach to Russian folk art that inspired a wholly modern art. Instead of a populist-inspired preservation of it, this new group of artists drew creative inspiration from the folk art's *innate* beauty rather than the subject itself, thus providing a gateway to the modern.

This gateway was to have remarkable implications for the entire development of Stravinsky's output, pervading his neoclassical and serial crises that ensued over the next half century. In the following discussion of neonationalist developments, a history of which is provided by Richard Taruskin in his 1986 essay "From Subject to Style: Stravinsky and the Painters", I am going to view the historical details and the concept of abstraction (implied by Taruskin's title) not for its relevance to Stravinsky's modernist revolt within his Russian period but as a broader ideal that extends to his so-called neoclassical crisis and beyond.

The fundamental change in attitude towards folk material in the late nineteenth century had beginnings in the work of the critic (and *kuchkism* proponent) Vladimir Stasov. Stasov's 1872 essay, "Russian Folk Ornament" was a collection of ornamental

motifs from embroideries, carvings, ceramics, and manuscripts. The essay considered such a collection beyond its archaeological value and stated the potential for the material to stimulate contemporary art.[6] It was the detail that struck visual artists, prompting a slightly different and yet radical approach to this folk art—one that would gradually be realized in the coming decades through the architectural designs and artwork of Alexandre Benois, Leon Bakst, and many others.

All of these artists were employed by members of the nobility and worked extensively in art colonies and craft workshops. Savva Mamontov founded the Private Opera Troupe in 1885, whose production of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snow Maiden* served as a landmark for neonationalist art. The musical "color harmonies" and these Slavic ornamental motifs were synthesized into the set designs.[7] In the 1890s, the Princess Maria Tenisheva would employ her own group of neonationalist artists who would soon make up the *Mir iskusstva* (World of Art movement), and in 1898, Sergei Diaghilev founded the art journal by the same name. As represented by the position of the journal, folk art, ornament, and architecture, in conjunction with a turn to Western contemporary art, now provided a distinct means in which Russian artists could be modernists. The intrinsic beauty of this art was the subject. Approached directly, this folk art was aesthetically autonomous.

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6 Ibid., 23.
7 Ibid., 24.

Neonationalism in Music

For decades, the "folklorist idiom" in compositional practices derived from imitating the refined practices of Balakirev and his school, having become detached from the original ideal of Russian musical "purity" by the 1890s.[8] Meanwhile, a group of ethnographers were, in fact, going to the source. Usually, these field transcribers would collect songs from individuals, but Iulii Melgunov, in his collections (1879, 1885) transcribed *all* the vocal parts in the songs—listening to his informants perform a song as it was usually performed. The *podgoloski*, or "undervoices" were especially of interest in this music; not only did they give insight into performance practices, but they also showed how the melody was ambiguous—each voice being equally important and possibly being the melody itself. Alfred Swan, the British-born American musicologist describes it:

> Starting with a solo intonation (*zapevalo*), the ensemble of singers would without any warning split into parts, each of which was also a self-sufficient melody not too divergent from the one that could conceivably be termed "principal." In actual fact there was *no* principal melody. Each singer could contend with justice that he was giving the basic contours of the song. The resultant tonal image converged into unison only at the very end, while the bulk of the song—always excepting the solo opening—was intoned in a kind of unfixable, yet new and baffling harmony.[9]

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[8] Ibid., 20.

[9] Ibid., 21. From Alfred J. Swan, *Russian Music and Its Sources in Chant and Folk Song* (New York, 1973), 25.

In 1897, ethnomusicologist Evgeniia Linyova was able to solve most of the problems of transcription by use of the phonograph. This furthered the insight into the Russian folk "spirit" because she could study more scientifically the details of the rhythm and versification. One of the major findings was the phenomenon of misaccentuation of the words, which pointed to the possibility of abstraction for composers and their move to modernism. Linyova made the startling prophecy about the potential of this material for musical innovation and exhorted composers to make use of folk song—not in the direct quotation of, but in the sense of style. She emphasized that Russian folk music was not "individualized music" but a mostly group affair with cool, emotionless execution, using no vocal ornamentations or sentimental emphases. The singer was not a singer but a vessel.[10] It was such findings that caught Stravinsky's attention.

Stravinsky's ardor for Linyova's work is well-known and plays a serious part in his future aesthetic goals, but it would not manifest until his peer group changed around 1909, constituting his abrupt modernistic turn. This group, surrounding Sergei Diaghilev, the founder of the Ballets Russes, was mostly made up of artists and dancers with unfavorable views of the *kuchkism* in which Stravinsky was trained.[11] The noticeable lack of musicians and composers in the group was striking; the artists and dancers would influence him far more so in his work, and he would be distanced from musical trends and the "continuum" at large.

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[10] Ibid., 32. Linyova describes an experience with an elderly peasant woman who performed a tune in a serious, clear manner, which in turn placed the emotional emphasis upon the words themselves.
[11] Ibid., 31.

Stravinsky's use of folk material in *Rite of Spring* served as the basis for transformation into a new musical language. Pieter van den Toorn, in his discussion of the "D scale" mode, shows how the symmetrical octatonic scale could be derived from the minor tetrachord substructure of the "D scale" known as Dorian mode.[12] This derivation of juxtaposition of the folk mode (diatonic) and chromatic (octatonic) is basic to the dramatic dualities that run throughout Stravinsky's music. The octatonic abstraction was to serve as one of the foundations of Stravinsky's modernist language in all of his early ballets. Paradoxically, his teacher (and *kuchkist*) Rimsky-Korsakov, claimed to have invented this scale, soon called the "Rimsky-Korsakov scale" by his students despite the fact that it already appeared in 19th century Romantic music (Liszt, Chopin, etc.) This transformation of folk modality into this symmetrical structure is one of the many techniques (along with rhythmic misaccentuations, etc.) that would characterize Stravinsky's neonationalist bent which is analogous to the move in art toward geometric design of Mikhail Larionov's and Natalia Goncharova's cubist paintings.

The Russian painters Larionov and Goncharova were Stravinsky's exact contemporaries, close friends, and fellow neonationalist radicals (whose "school" was aptly called neoprimitivist.[13]) After several large, important exhibits in Russia, they relocated to Paris to work with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. In their style of

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12 Pieter van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.) The D scale is characterized by the 2-1-2 tetrachord, which identifies the octatonic model of 2-1-2-1 etc. with Van den Toorn's Neoclassical C-scale form, characterized by the triadic/leading tone function, 1-2-1-2 [etc.] octatonic model.

13 "Neoprimitivist" has also been used to describe Stravinsky's period from the *Rite* and dottedly through the early 1920s.

painting, the folk motifs served as the inspiration, but were absorbed so deeply that the subject actually disappeared, leaving only the stylistic influence in the way of color, perspective, and surface.[14] (Larionov would design the production of *Renard* in 1922 and Gonchorova did *Les Noces* in 1923.)

The philosophical basis of neonationalism continued in Stravinsky's works throughout the second decade of the twentieth century. He was already showing a keen interest in the syllables and sequences of the words in the Russian verse—a preoccupation that will be expounded upon in the discussion of the *Oedipus* libretto. The dance-cantata *Les Noces* (conceived in 1914, finished in 1921) serves as a significant historical stage in the perpetuation of these ideals in the time preceding his neoclassical period. While exiled in Switzerland before and during the First World War, Stravinsky immersed himself in Russian folklore and poetry, stringing together and overlapping bits of the popular verse to form the libretto for a dance-cantata: "[*Les Noces*]…is a suite of typical wedding episodes told through quotations of typical talk…As a collection of clichés and quotations of typical wedding sayings it might be compared to one of those scenes in Ulysses in which the reader seems to be overhearing scraps of conversation without connecting the thread of discourse."[15]

The instrumentation of *Les Noces* underwent many transformations during its gestation—from a huge orchestra divided into two large sections (winds/vocals and percussion), to vocals and a percussion orchestra divided into pitched and unpitched

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[14] Ibid., 37. See Appendix C.

[15] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 115.

sections.[16] This reduction of instrumentation was due in part to the wartime economy and hardship but can also be seen as an abstraction of the large orchestra he had originally intended to utilize—a scoring that would have resembled his earlier Russian works. Musically, *Les Noces* was mainly modal and non-chromatic, with the meter following the irregular rhythm of the texts.[17] The orchestra was subservient to the voices. There were minimal stage directions which were included only in the score itself, with the orchestra on stage *with* the actor-singers.

Les Noces was meant as a divertissement, not as a full-fledged "reproduction" of a Russian peasant wedding.[18] This reduction of instrumentation, staging, performance directions, and the conflation of genre are particularly striking. All of these features depict Stravinsky's wartime circumstances of economic hardship and inevitable permanent separation from Russia. But more so, they embody neonationalist ideals of using and abstracting a folk subject (here, poetry and custom), and also foreshadow the neoclassical ideal of reduction and objectivity.

If *Les Noces* serves as a significant historical stage of the perpetuation of neonationalist ideals in the time leading up to Stravinsky's neoclassical era and *Oedipus Rex*, then *Histoire du Soldat* (1918) aptly serves as the transformative stage. The simplified production and reduced instrumentation of this theatrical work was again the

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16 Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 216. The pitched percussion were four pianos, xylophone, timpani, crotales and bell. Unpitched percussion included two side-drums, two drums, tambourine, bass drum, cymbals, and triangle.

17 Ibid., 217.

18 Ibid., 220.

result of the wartime economical conditions but also signified a new direction. This "acted narration" presented different episodes of a soldier and the devil in tableau form. Although Stravinsky drew his narrative material from a Russian folk tale collection, he broadened the stories from being purely Russian to appeal to international audiences.[19]

Although Stravinsky still uses Russian folk material as the basis of the narrative of *Histoire*, his use of past and present musical elements, the asymmetrical conglomeration (and reduction) of musical styles, and the transcendence of the music over the dramatic narrative (at a key moment in the play) all serve to abstract this work from its various sources. Musically, Stravinsky brings in many different elements from the past and present. Quotations from jazz, Lutheran chorales, pasodobles, tango, and French popular song pervade the texture, which is already reduced. The use of polymeter, counterpoint, prolongation, and elision skews the symmetry.[20] The influence of jazz, however, is the most notable feature and is acknowledged as such by Stravinsky himself: "Jazz meant, in any case, a wholly new sound in my music. *L'Histoire* marks my final break with the Russian orchestral school in which I had been fostered."[21] In his schematic analysis of the work, Eric Walter White has noted that something interesting happens at the climax of the play. During the "Devil's Triumphal Dance", the music becomes more than just incidental music—it transcends the overall work and becomes

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[19] Ibid., 227.
[20] Ibid., 234.
[21] Stravinsky and Craft, *Expositions*, 91-92.

the pervading force over the drama itself, "…thereby raising it to a higher power than the mere sum of its parts."[22]

By the 1920s, Stravinsky's new compositional direction was felt throughout his works. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 provided a literal and figurative break from his homeland; Stravinsky would not see his property there again and knew he must live and work outside of Russia from then on. This separation from his own country and upbringing would manifest in his music by way of a conscious break from the "Russian-style" orchestrations and use of Russian subjects (acknowledged for *Histoire du Soldat*), with a move towards the austerity and objectivity of his neoclassical era. *Octet* (1923) signals a crucial moment in Stravinsky's neoclassical period. Using a wind ensemble, he utilizes sonata form, with repetition and symmetry as proportional structural control. This work is architectural—timbres are separated, dynamics are terraced, and sudden tonal shifts occur within the Classical and Baroque forms, giving the work its distinct blocks.[23] The three movements—Movement I, "Sinfonia"; Movement II, "Tema con Variazione" (D-minor variations ending with a "Fugato"); and Movement III, "Finale" (rondo with a coda)—begin the trend in his instrumental works of the 1920s of abstracting tonality within closed forms.[24] In addition to architectural construction, the spare textures and

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22 White, 231.

23 Elliott Antokoletz, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1998), 273.

24 In the variations movement, we also find a move towards a multiplicity of ratios (here, 6:8), the first hint of which comes in the title of the work, "Octet"—the six-lettered word itself denotes a grouping of eight. Three of the instruments are doubled (trombone, trumpet, bassoon), making six of the eight total instruments.

mechanical rhythms set the precedent for the austerity and objectivity of Stravinsky's neoclassical works to come.[25]

[25] Ibid., 274.

Jean Cocteau and the French Musical/Literary Landscape

Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), like other French writers of his time, drew considerable creative inspiration from composers and their music. Throughout the 1910s, he had several "revelations" regarding his own identity with certain composers and their works. These were made possible by an abrupt change in attitude regarding *new* music. According to Jann Pasler, Cocteau's main interest lay in his "confrontive relationship with the public." Pasler states: "For Cocteau (to cite the composer Ned Rorem), music 'inevitably reflected situations rather than constructions, social rapport with makers and their audiences rather than the creative process.'[…]"[26]

Cocteau grew up in a socially prominent and music-loving family. As a child and adolescent, he attended subscription series concerts at the Opéra and the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. Notably, these subscription series were known to be much more traditional—only two new works were performed each year and the organizers promoted their venues as more of a "museum" for music. The audiences for these series attended concerts for social obligation as much as the performance itself. Another set of subscription series, including those at the Opéra Comique, the Concerts Lamoureux, and Concerts Colonne, were far more open to performing new works and had their own distinct audiences.[27] In other words, musical tastes were in part a determinant of social standing and political orientation, and there were frequent clashes over musical values and the broader socio-political ideals they implied. Cocteau, in the first decade of the

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26 Jann Pasler, "New Music as Confrontation: The Musical Sources of Jean Cocteau's Identity," *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991): 256.
27 Ibid., 258.

twentieth century, held more of the traditional attitudes towards new music that reflected his social milieu.

It would be *Le Sacre du Printemps* that would constitute Cocteau's inevitable embrace of new works. Stravinsky deeply inspired him. Cocteau began to define originality as that which contradicts preceding expression.[28] In *David* (1914), he had hoped to collaborate with Stravinsky but the collaboration never materialized. This work is notable; the main character, who is masked, opens Scene 1 with a text regarding *exterior and interior* – the relationship between artist and public.[29] This type of dynamic is also present in Cocteau's later collaborations with Erik Satie (*Parade*, 1917), Darius Milhaud (*Le boeuf sur le toit*, 1919; *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, 1921), and other members of Les Six. Cocteau was especially struck by Satie's use of extreme simplicity, humor, and his unhindered originality, which was not compelled to be defined in contrast to what preceded it. In Satie's mechanical reduction of musical materials, Cocteau saw a more "French" music. Cocteau also noticed Satie's relationship with his own audience; Satie maintained a "protective" anonymity that allowed him the freedom to compose according to his own direction.[30] Satie helped Cocteau turn his attention towards a working-class milieu and popular music. In turn, he began to frequent jazz clubs. He

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[28] Ibid., 262.

[29] Ibid., 263. "Enter ladies and gentlemen! Enter inside—enter ourselves! To the other side! To the interior! Outside one only sees my poor friend the acrobat who, for the eye, is like an orchestral instrument for the ear…everything—inside outside happens at the same time."

[30] Ibid., 268. Satie never wrote a large-scale piece and did most of his work in cafés.

was struck at how this music affected the public differently; it was simply too loud for conversation.[31] This change in surroundings had a lasting effect on his artistic identity.

Parade, Cocteau's 1917 collaboration with Satie and Pablo Picasso, was a *réaliste* ballet that he had been commissioned to write for the Ballets Russes. Intended as a reaction to the vagueness of impressionism, the Cubist work was musically simple, mechanical, and objective.[32] Such objectivity is seen in the abstracted, wooden-framed costume designs by Picasso and is mirrored in the block structures, mechanical ostinato layers of the entire musical fabric. These soon-to-be neoclassical traits would continue to guide Cocteau's own aesthetic ideals as well as mark the move to a more proportional control in music.

In the 1920s and 30s, Cocteau was working at refining his "poetry of the spectacle", or *poésie de théâtre*. There is an important distinction to be made about this—that the original concept of *poésie au theatre*, which was traditional verbal lyricism in theatre, was altered by Cocteau in order to realize what he felt a modern adaptation should be: a removal of the patina in order to "reveal youthfulness that will never wither."[33] In the cases of his re-compositions of *Antigone*, *Oedipe-roi*, and *Roméo et Juliette*, this entailed paring down the text into a skeletal version of the original, or *text-pretéxte.* Bauschatz described this as "radically reducing the complications of the

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31 Ibid., 269.

32 Antokoletz, 246.

33 Toni W. Andrus, "Oedipus Revisited: Cocteau's 'Poésie de théâtre'," *The French Review* 48, No. 4 (March 1975): 722.

original storyline."[34] These condensed versions emphasized aspects that were not highlighted in the original play and were enhanced by dramatic stage effects. In *Oedipus Rex*, however, the stage effects were not dramatic in the normative sense, which will be discussed later.

Reworkings of *Oedipus Rex* in the Interwar Era

During the interwar period, there was a surge in French adaptations of *Oedipus Rex* that stemmed from the cultural and intellectual sentiments that surrounded World War I. The devastation of this war in France (as in Europe at large) produced a sense of urgency to cling to its own cultural roots, emphasizing a classical heritage—a "reinstatement of a classical past."[35] Re-workings of *Oedipus Rex* around that time included those of Georges du Bouhelier (1919), Cocteau (*La machine infernale*, 1934; *Oedipe-roi* 1937), Andre Gide (1932), and George Enescu (1936).[36] In her study of the French *Oedipus* of the interwar period, Fiona Macintosh states that ". . . the use of ancient myth no doubt afforded opportunities to playwrights in the interwar period to explore contemporary issues with the safety of mythical distance, just as it had done previously in France's theatrical history."[37] This distancing of past subject matter and the drastic reductions therein indicated a neoclassicism that extended into the art and literary realms.

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34 Paul Bauschatz, "Oedipus: Stravinsky and Cocteau Recompose Sophocles," *Comparative Literature* 43, No. 2 (Spring 1991): 151.

35 Fiona Macintosh, "The French Oedipus of the Inter-war Period," in *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*, ed. Simon Goldhill and Edith Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159.

36 Ibid, 158.

37 Ibid., 157.

The most relevant theatrical influence on the Stravinsky/Cocteau *Oedipus* was Max Reinhardt's 1910 production of the play (using a German Hofmannsthal version from 1906.)[38] This version was very successful and was played all over Europe, later being revived in 1916. The play was innovative: there was no proscenium, entrances and exits were through the isles in the audience, the acting space was up high, with large steps in tiers. These things, combined with the huge chorus, provided direct interaction and sensual stimulation for the audience.[39] In stark contrast to that one, Stravinsky's *Oedipus* was "small scale, static, and cold", with all expectations baffled. It is as if Stravinsky intentionally did not use conventions that would have ensured the opera's commercial success.[40]

Regarding Cocteau's other recompositions of the play, *Oedipe-roi* and *La Machine Infernale,* the characters have been "individualized" so that their actions become idiosyncratic.[41] So much from the original play is missing, which places emphasis on the differences created by what is left out by Cocteau.[42] In *La Machine Infernale,* Oedipus, Jocasta, Tiresias, and the Sphinx *all* share center stage, while Oedipus battles the infernal machine in his mind. The Machine was actually a 4x4 meter platform that served as performance space and implied an oracle-like control over the characters. The Voice, a parallel to the Speaker in the opera-oratorio, gives brief introductions before each section

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38 Equally innovative and impactful was a 1903 Hofmannsthal version of *Elektra*; the story is the reversal of the characters' gender relationships from that of *Oedipus Rex*.

39 Bauschatz, 152.

40 Ibid., 153.

41 Ibid., 157.

42 Ibid., 158.

of the play.[43] Cocteau greatly reduced the background historical context, placing the characters in a modern city setting, giving the play what Francis Steegmuller calls the air of a "modern situation comedy."[44] In *Oedipe-roi*, Cocteau leaves out important episodes and greatly shortens the speeches, creating a new effect from the Sophocles play. Cocteau called this version "a free adaptation of Sophocles," rejecting overall a faithful reenactment of the original play and the realism of late nineteenth century French theatre.[45] Aside from one mention of Cadmus at the beginning (like the original play), Cocteau omits all references to the Theban dynasty (there are no choral odes) thereby reducing its historical scope.[46]

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[43] Macintosh, 172.

[44] Francis Steegmuller, *Cocteau: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 431.

[45] Andrus, 728. "[Cocteau's] generous use of space, combined with his total elimination of the familiar in object, costume, and gesture clearly separated him from the realistic tradition in theatre." Andrus points out that Cocteau was deeply influenced by the Ballets Russes during this time.

[46] Bauschatz, 158.

The Genesis and Development of *Oedipus Rex*, the opera-oratorio

Stravinsky approached Jean Cocteau in 1925, having been inspired by his adaptation of *Antigone*, to write the libretto of *Oedipus Rex*.[47] By this time, he had had a vague idea for a large-scale music drama since about 1920, especially since his permanent expatriation from Russia.[48] *Oedipus Rex* contained the "universal" plot he desired—he did not want to "have to elaborate its exposition," but "leave the play behind" to focus on the purely musical dramatization.[49] This was to be a present to Sergei Diaghilev, founder of the Ballets Russes, for the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the company. He had a specific vision for this work—an opera-oratorio, austere, boiled down to its dramatic essence, distanced even more so through time and space:

> I invited Cocteau's collaboration because I greatly admired his *Antigone*. I told him my ideas and cautioned him that I did not want an action drama, but a 'still life.' I also said that I wanted a conventional libretto with arias and recitatives, though the conventional, I knew, was not his strongest suit. He appeared to be enthusiastic about the project except for the notion that his phrases were to be recast in Latin, but the first draft of his libretto was precisely what I did not want: a music drama in meretricious prose.[50]

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47 Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 22.

48 Stravinsky and Craft, *Expositions*, 22.

49 Maureen Carr, *Multiple Masks: Neoclassicism in Stravinsky's Works on Greek Subjects* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 24.

50 Ibid., 22. This passage in *Dialogues* is followed by a brief discussion of the terms "music drama" and "opera"; Stravinsky prefers the terms "prose opera" and "verse opera" (respectively) when referring to Wagnerian opera and opera of a more classical style.

It took Cocteau three tries to get Stravinsky what he wanted, and even then Stravinsky revised it further. His desired return to old operatic standards would accommodate better the "static representation" that he envisioned. He did not want a through-composed "Wagnerian monster," which is what he thought Cocteau's first draft suggested.[51] Stravinsky deliberately wanted the emphasis to be on the words (to be translated into Latin later) rather than on ideas, taking the focus off of the characters and placing it upon the fatal development of the play itself that would be controlled by and realized through the music.[52] The words were to *replace* gestures, addressing the audience directly instead of the other characters.[53]

The first performance was in concert form on May 30, 1927 in Paris at Theatre Sarah Bernhardt.[54] Diaghilev did not like or understand it, and commercially the opera-oratorio fared dismally. The press said of the premier: "The man who composed *Petroushka* now gives us this Handelian pastiche. . . A lot of badly dressed people sang badly. . . The music for Creon is a Meyerbeerian march," and declaring it a "[. . .] poorly performed revival of Handel or Rossini." It did not help that Stravinsky was late in finishing the score, which rushed the performers in learning it, and thus making for a mediocre performance.[55]

To be sure, the placement of *Oedipus Rex* on the program with (among other things) the *Firebird* seemed to significantly clash with audience expectation. It is in two

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51 Stephen Walsh, *Oedipus Rex: Cambridge Music Handbook* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.
52 Steegmuller, 355.
53 Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, 23-24.
54 Bauschatz, 150.
55 Ibid., 386.

acts, and the entire performance is less than one hour long. The singers are stone-still (with the exception of certain fundamental gestures) unless they are entering and exiting, and all the characters wear masks. There was a grand purpose for this. According to Stravinsky: "The portrait of the individual as the victim of circumstances is made far more starkly effective by this static representation."[56] The Latin text also serves to distance and alienate the audience, who is filled in by the casual and unemotional Speaker (speaking in his own language) before each scene.[57] Because the characters do not interact with one another on stage, the action of the plot is hidden to the audience, and this underscores Stravinsky's purpose that we should not emotionally respond to the characters but to the tragedy itself. There is too much distance in time, language, and theatrical treatment; to empathize with the characters is to misunderstand them and thus miss the purpose of this portrayal.[58] Here, the distance is only filled by the music and the characters are only real through their voices.[59]

The Libretto

Cocteau's libretto is brief and spare. Probably the most noteworthy Cocteauian addition is the Speaker, who speaks in the vernacular (in this case, French), and appears at key moments in the plot, acting as a type of "punctuation" to the overall flow. This gives it unprecedented distance, detaching the audience even more so from the play itself.

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56 Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, 24.

57 Steegmuller, 358. In 1926, seminarian Jean Daniélou translated Cocteau's libretto into Ciceronian Latin, leaving the Speaker's lines in French. The English version was translated by E.E. Cummings. [See full libretto in Walsh, 79-91]

58 Bauschatz, 158.

59 Ibid., 153, 154.

The speaker's six speeches pace the music within the opera-oratorio, articulating the "musical *tableaux vivant* of the Latin setting and for emphasizing their monumentality and artificiality."[60] Each of these interjections serves to introduce a character and propel forward the drama. Since the libretto's text is already a condensed version of the play, the Speaker seems to accelerate the action (or *psychological* action) to a breakneck pace. Stephen Walsh says the narration is a pseudo-narrative device, lying within the frame of the opera-oratorio itself, not from without. The Speaker, however, is still linguistically and spatially detached from the actor-singers. Even so, the relation between the viewer (hearer) and the viewed (heard) is highlighted. There is a gap between them—"a separation from direct experience of their meaning by a distance of culture and language."[61]

Also notably absent in Cocteau's libretto is the presence of Theban history. This history pervades the original play and is the cornerstone—acting as the glue and aiding the audience's understanding of events and recognition of the key moments.[62] Walsh mentions that *Oedipus Rex* was well known to fifth-century B.C. Athenians, who would have known that Oedipus was the son of King Laius and Jocasta of Thebes, about the oracle and the child's exposure on the mountain side, and his adoption by Polybus.[63] In Cocteau's libretto, any background information, however scant, is given by the Speaker in his sectional "narrations." Aside from an assumed familiarity with the play, a modern

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60 Walsh, 17, 18.
61 Ibid., 18.
62 Bauschatz, 158.
63 Walsh, 11.

audience is provided with no historical frame of reference in the Cocteau-Stravinsky collaboration.

The Music

To simply view this work as a neoclassical musical drama hybrid with a conventional libretto and Baroque operatic devices would be to miss its richness in compositional detail as well as its vital position within Stravinsky's output.

Pieter van den Toorn champions a predominantly octatonic reading of the opera-oratorio, with brief, intermittent tonally functional passages with impurities (i.e. elements outside of the traditional harmonic language). Any use of the Baroque and Classical C-scale conceptions are chromatically inflected by elements of the Model A octatonic scale (1-2-1).[64] Because the diatonicism is infused with octatonicism, the overall functionality of tonic-dominant relations remains ambiguous. While Wilfrid Mellers[65] and Maureen Carr[66] have made compelling cases for a tonal analysis and the work having octatonic implications through a *diatonic* framework (respectively), van den Toorn takes the octatonic approach. He argues that "the subtlety, the techniques of triadic reiteration, of oscillation and superimposition, all the pitch-relational identity and distinction…must inevitably be set aside or ignored when squeezing, in bulk, whole contexts like *Oedipus*

64 Van den Toorn, 261. See footnote 12. The break with his "Russian" period constituted the increased use of the 1-2-1 octatonic collection and demise of the 2-1-2 collection.

65 Wilfrid Mellers, "Stravinsky's *Oedipus* as 20th-Century Hero," *The Musical Quarterly 48, No. 3, Special Issue for Igor Stravinsky on His 80th Anniversary* (July 1962): 300-312.

66 Carr, 41.

Rex into the Baroque or Classical C-scale tonally functional compound."[67] Although the work takes on a diatonic hue, a closer look will reveal the elements that foil a purely tonal reading of it—namely the presence of an octatonic framework.

An ideal example of how Stravinsky imposes diatonic-like blocks over an octatonic infrastructure can be seen in Act II (Nos. 177 through 121+1—See Appendix A.) Following Jocasta's aria in which she scolds Oedipus and Tiresias for arguing in the afflicted city and proclaims her unbelief in oracles, the Chorus begins to chant "trivium" ("crossroads") over a pulsating Bb chord played in the piano, harp, cellos, and timpani. Oedipus is suddenly afraid, remembering that he had once killed an old man at a crossroads. This is where Mellers places the "moment of self-revelation, when [Oedipus] sees that the guilt is within…".[68] In a last desperate attempt to console Oedipus and divert him from this discovery, Jocasta frantically declaims that oracles are liars ("Oracula mentiuntur") and begs him to return home because "there is no truth here" ("Non est consulendum").[69]

After the pulsating eighth-note Bb chord that underlines the Chorus's chant of "trivium" (No. 117), Oedipus expresses his great fear of that word—"Pavesco subito, Jocasta…locuta es de trivio?"[70] At this point, the drumming Bb chord (retained as an ostinato) is contrapuntally reinterpreted against changing tonal figurations and moves through those of Bb-minor (plus E), F-minor seventh, F-dominant seventh, F#-minor, and

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67 Ibid., 305.
68 Mellers, 307.
69 Walsh, 86.
70 "I am afraid suddenly, Jocasta…did you speak of the crossroads?"

G-major chords, with the succession culminating in C-minor. However, (at two measures before No. 119) a complete C-minor chord is disrupted by the retention of F# in the violas. Oedipus, now unaccompanied, remembers killing an old man at a crossroads. His lines are punctuated by the timpani that drum out an arpeggiated C-minor chord. He sings the lines "ego senem kekidi, cum Corintho exkederem, kekidi in trivio, kekidi, Jocasta, senem"[71] on three pitches—G, Eb, D, and G. This permits two impressions: one, that he is avoiding C, (the "tonic" as indicated by the timpani); the other, that he is choosing to "remain" in G-minor, unwilling to resolve to C. Either way, this illustrates Oedipus's psychological struggle at this moment of illumination. As he comes to the realization of the truth, the orchestra finally hammers a C-minor chord (No. 121). At this critical moment, as marked by the harmony, Jocasta herself realizes the truth after having attempted to divert Oedipus. In her unwillingness to publicly accept it, she continues her effort at his diversion.

In Mellers' tonally-functional reading of the work, he attributes key areas to doctrinal truths adhered to and embedded in Stravinsky's compositional technique of this era.[72] Drawing on these key associations while simultaneously using van den Toorn's octatonic analysis, I will attempt to show the gravity of this moment within the libretto-drama and how Stravinsky achieved the fatal development of the play being portrayed

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71 "I killed an old man when I was coming from Corinth, killed him at the crossroads, I killed, Jocasta, an old man." Regarding the use of the letter "k" and other linguistic oddities, see Stravinsky-Craft, *Dialogues*, pages 30-31: "Unusual grammatical constructions can be found […]; but the Latinist is already horrified by the first letter of my score, the 'K', which does not exist in the language he knows. The purpose of this barbarian orthography was to secure hard, or at least non-Italianized, sounds instead of the usual potpourri of classic and ecclesiastic." Carr (54-58) discusses Stravinsky's alteration of some of the Latin word-endings for the reason of rhyme.

72 Mellers, 309.

through the music itself, rather than through action on stage.[73] The key associations concerned here include Bb (the key of Destiny), G-minor (the key of Acceptance), G-major (the key of Hope), F# (Denial, the polarity of C), and C (the key of God/truth).[74] These key areas will presuppose a distant tonal functionality, but this will ultimately be thwarted by devices imposed by the composer, including oscillation, reiteration, and superimposition, as mentioned above.

Throughout the opera-oratorio, the key of Bb briefly appears at different moments to indicate the previously-unknown cause of the suffering of Thebes.[75] This "key of Destiny" manifests in full-force just after Jocasta's aria in Act II at the Chorus's chant of "trivium." At this moment, the Chorus seems to take on the role of Oedipus's conscience. The incantatory nature of this passage reinforces the gravity of the realization in Oedipus's mind. He is at once fearful after being incredulous the whole time, and outwardly expresses his fear of this word to Jocasta. During his exclamation, the held Bb chord gradually changes shades of meaning, moving through the previously-mentioned tonalities to the G-major chord (Hope), attempting a resolution to C (God/Truth, two measures before No. 119). However, a lingering F# (Denial) in the

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73 Stravinsky and Craft, *Chronicle of a Friendship*, 2nd ed. (Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), 204. "My idea was that […] I could concentrate the whole attention of the audience, undistracted by the story, on the music itself, which would thus become both word and action."

74 See also the analogous meaning in Richard Strauss's *Elektra*. The same psychological implications and key associations are examined in detail in Elliott Antokoletz's *Musical Symbolism in the Operas of Debussy and Bartók: Trauma, Gender, and the Unfolding of the Unconscious* (Oxford, 2004), 265, Fig. 13-1. The polarity of C and F# (God and denial) in *Oedipus Rex* is similar to that of the symmetrically-disposed keys Bb and F# (keys of the mother and father) that surround D (Elektra's key and the axis). All of these keys are eventually overcome by the key of C, (triumph over death of the mother.) Then, the tritone polarity of C and F# are equivalent in the Strauss and Stravinsky settings.

75 Mellers, 303.

violas indicates a persisting tendency for denial of the truth. After this C-minor chord with F#, the unaccompanied Oedipus is temporarily alone with his conscience and in the very process of "realizing", with the C-minor arpeggiation pounding in the timpani, punctuating his lines. Oedipus avoids singing the "tonic", keeping to a G-Eb-D-G iteration. This ambiguity—whether he is singing in C-minor or G-minor—manifests his internal struggle with the truth. The orchestra will finally take over at No. 121 with a forte, punched C-minor chord, fulfilling the oracles and demonstrating an open acknowledgment of the truth, despite what has yet to transpire in the dialogue.[76]

A few details require closer examination in the passage from No. 117 to 119. The ostinato Bb chord is only in root position in the harp, staying in second inversion (F-Bb) in the piano and lowest cello. The implied tonalities above it are also never in root position. This conveys the impression of instability—a state of denial that persists until it no longer can (No. 121).[77] F# is being encircled during this passage (through F-minor, F#-minor, and G-minor), and is emphasized as a contending force with the gradual pull towards the truth.

The presence of the F# (in the violas at No. 119-3) that seemingly foils a clean resolution to C can be attributed to the underlying presence of an octatonic structure. The Model A collection (1-2-1) contains the components of a major or minor triad and a

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[76] Jocasta will continue try to divert Oedipus from this discovery and falsify the oracles, but to no avail. She will retire inside, leaving Oedipus speculating over the nature of his birth in one last attempt to deny the truth (prior to his dialogue with the Messenger and Shepherd.) For this reason, the key could not resolve to C major (a full realization and acknowledgment of the oracles/truth), and resolved to C minor.

[77] At this point, Jocasta's continued, frantic denial of the truth of oracles becomes a repeated chromatic descent from C to F# (in ostinato fashion), sometimes slightly varied, but gradually weakening until No. 127 when she exits.

dominant seventh chord, giving the impression of diatonicism. However, it also contains the "tritone" to the "tonic" of the aforementioned triads, which, in this case abstracts any sense of tonal functionality that is implied. Through diatonic "shades" over the Bb ostinato chord, the passage from No. 117 to 118 oscillates around the F#-minor "triad", exhibiting the emerging presence of an octatonic collection that is fully exposed for what it is in the violas (No. 119-3). The F# is thereafter manifested in Jocasta's lines (No. 121-127), marking the conflict between C (truth, which has already been internally understood by Oedipus and "outed" by the orchestra) and her own public denial of it. In this way, we see how the octatonicism controls any sense of diatonicism. The latter cannot achieve a full functionality in the traditional sense.

In his analysis of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), Elliott Antokoletz demonstrates how the interplay of the key schemes can be extended to include interactions between diatonic and octatonic spheres, wherein the latter serves as the basis of the whole work.[78] The discussed key schemes are outlined in Mellers' 1971 article "1930: Symphony of Psalms", in which he explores Stravinsky's "doctrinal plan" that is manifested in their interplay within the superficially Baroque form.[79] Antokoletz shows how the octatonic collection (at No. 5) contains the three diatonic chords that are integral to the key schemes mentioned.[80] In this way, octatonic collections encompass *all*

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78 Antokoletz, 279.

79 Wilfrid Mellers, "1930: Symphony of Psalms," *Tempo* 97 (1971): 19. C is God's key, Eb is Man's key, and E Phrygian denotes intercession and prayer.

80 Antokoletz, 280. See Example 10-5.

perceived diatonic behavior, indicating the latter's dependency on the former for its own movement.

For *Oedipus Rex*, finished three years prior to *Symphony of Psalms*, this concept can still be applied. The pivotal moment discussed earlier is controlled by the F#, the sole "other" within the tonal scheme of the entire passage, and is the explanation for the lack of any real functionality in the way of voice-leading as well as tonic-dominant relations. However, the F# still has a dual interpretation by the diatonic and octatonic realms, respectively. For Oedipus (and humankind), the F# denotes a stalling, hesitant sentiment on the path to the acknowledgement of the truth. It stops G-major from fully reconciling to C, and it maintains its displacement within the C-minor passage in Jocasta's final plea. For the oracles (and thus God), the F# actually serves as the impetus to resolve to truth (as seen and heard by Man), remaining ever present even in the face of a half-hearted acknowledgement in the music at No. 121 (C-*minor* as opposed to major), giving Man the impression he can forestall it, but it the truth is omnipresent. Lives spent in the attempt to avoid oracles actually fulfill them in the process. The octatonic realm, therefore, represents the ubiquitous presence of God and makes up the diatonic façade of humankind.

Overall stylistic comparisons of *Oedipus Rex* (in spite of the musical language) to Verdi, Handel and Bach are somewhat founded. The work can be seen as a derivative of a Handel oratorio or a Bach passion in some of the surface details such as its harmonic

(rather than contrapuntal) basis, presentation, form, and language.[81] However, more notable likenesses can be seen in Verdi's *Macbeth,* especially within the passage examined above. Throughout *Macbeth*, the C-Db dyad claims a dramatic role in certain key scenes of the opera, as explored by Antokoletz in his study.[82] A strict comparison reveals an analogy between the half-step motif in a cappella form at Oedipus's recollection of killing Laius at the crossroads (Nos. 119-3 through 121) and the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth*. In Act I, scene 2 (mm. 11-12), this motif appears unaccompanied at the line "tutto è finito!"[83] [Fig. 1]

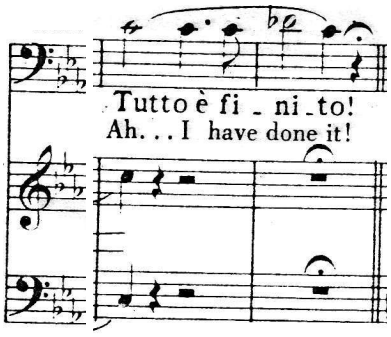

Fig. 1

Likewise, Oedipus utters the lines "…locuta es de trivio?" unaccompanied on D-Eb [Fig. 2], followed by his *a cappella* realization (with interspersed timpani) featuring the same iteration, but bordered by Gs.

81 Walsh, 37, 47.

82 Elliott Antokoletz, "Verdi's Dramatic Use of Harmony and Tonality in Macbeth," *In Theory Only – Journal of the Michigan Music Theory Society* 4, No. 6 (November/December 1979): 17.

83 "Ah…I have done it!"

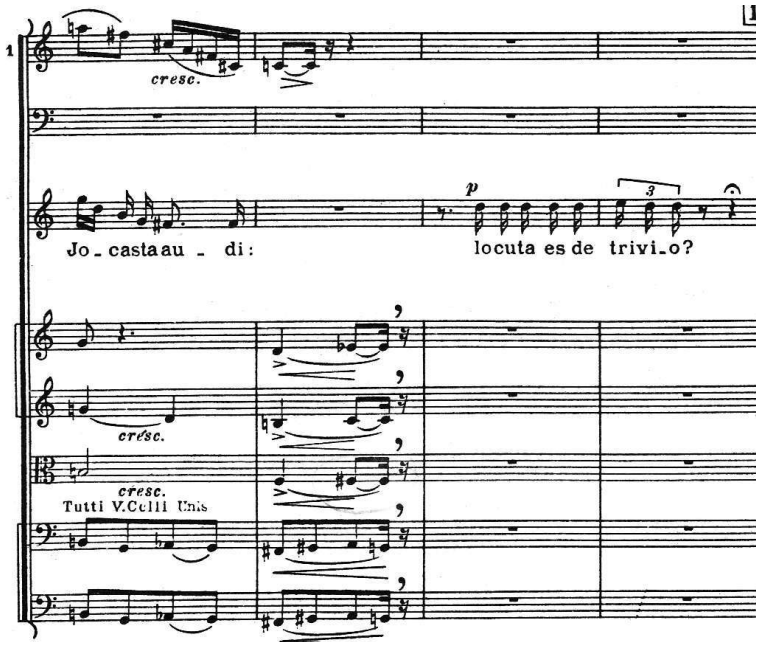

Fig. 2

In each respective passage, upward emphasis is placed within the last sung word ("finito", "trivio"). The C-Db dyad in *Macbeth* is also appears in the Finale of Act I (the discovery of the murder), the Finale of Act II (the banquet scene in which Macbeth's guilty conscience induces hallucinations of Banquo's murder), and in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene (her guilt is manifested through her hallucination of blood-stained hands.)[84] In this way, we see that this half-step dyad is foregrounded in passages of psychological conflict.

There are many more features of *Oedipus Rex* that can be compared to Verdi's operas, with connections with *Aida*, *Otello*, and the case of Jocasta's aria in its respective sections (the slow "Nonn'erubeskite" with the faster, frenzied section that follows it.)[85]

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84 Ibid., 17.
85 Walsh, 47.

Despite these noteworthy stylistic and gestural associations to past models and eras, *Oedipus Rex* really obtains its overall unity in the fusion of these elements into something separate and modern.[86]

86 Ibid., 30.

Epilogue

At the time of *Oedipus Rex*'s inception, Stravinsky had had a deeply significant religious experience, which resulted in his return to the Russian Orthodox Church. Immediately came the first of many religious works that would span the rest of his career, the *Pater Noster*.[87] Although Stravinsky denied that this rendition of *Oedipus Rex* was deliberately Christianized,[88] certain aspects of it resonate with this idea. The Sophocles play is boiled down (through Cocteau's libretto) to a highly-architectural rendering of the drama that is symbolized and propelled through the music, separating it from its former existence as a Greek tragedy. As seen through the discussed excerpt above, the dynamic between God (oracles) and humankind is magnified, bringing to attention the frailty of humankind. Diatonic blocks feign functionality, but in reality, they are controlled by the octatonic framework (connoting God's realm), despite efforts to avoid the fulfillment of the oracles. The Latin text brings a liturgical element to the adaptation and distances the audience more so from its origins in Greek tragedy. The use of octatonicism to control any sense of diatonicism would be fully realized in Stravinsky's works to come, namely the *Symphony of Psalms*.

The performance of *Oedipus Rex* resembles the cool, detached expression of folk song by Russian peasants as described by Linyova. The emotionless rendering of the text places the attention on the power of the words themselves rather than their delivery. The

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87 See Stravinsky-Craft, *Dialogues* (26) for a full account of this religious experience. The *Pater Noster* was a work for mixed choir a cappella and was not published until 1932.

88 Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, 26. "A Christianized *Oedipus* would require the truth-finding process to resemble an *auto-da-fé*, and I had no interest in attempting that. I can testify that the music was composed during my strictest and most earnest period of Christian Orthodoxy."

reduction of the text constitutes Cocteau's *poésie de théâtre* and accentuates his own keen interest in the relationship between the artist and the public, wherein his true art lays. His "removal of the patina" to expose the pure drama, along with Stravinsky's musical delivery, highlights the very essence of Stravinsky's vision for this rendition: "…the portrait of the individual as victim of circumstances." The distance of the Greek tragedy to the audience is heightened by this portrayal, but is filled in by the music, which is an abstraction of past operatic models and musical language. We hear familiar elements of diatonicism, and yet there is no fulfillment of expectation—the traditional, operatic sense of musical momentum is continually interrupted by the Speaker's interjections.[89] Moreover, the music structure and action do not conspire for effect in order to produce a tragic catharsis. The music, action, and language are "highly mediated."[90] Roger Sessions has remarked that any resemblance to an oratorio is loose, thus the oratorio model serves as a point of departure to something completely different in character and effect.[91]

In closing, we see that Russian neonationalist ideals are innate in *Oedipus Rex*. Each component discussed above is an abstraction from its predecessor. There are no quotations or passages directly set from any past source. The play itself exists only in the highly-abbreviated verse libretto by Cocteau which has been retranslated into Latin. Musically, we are vaguely reminded of tonality, but a closer examination betrays a non-functionality that is only explained by octatonicism, the real controlling force behind the

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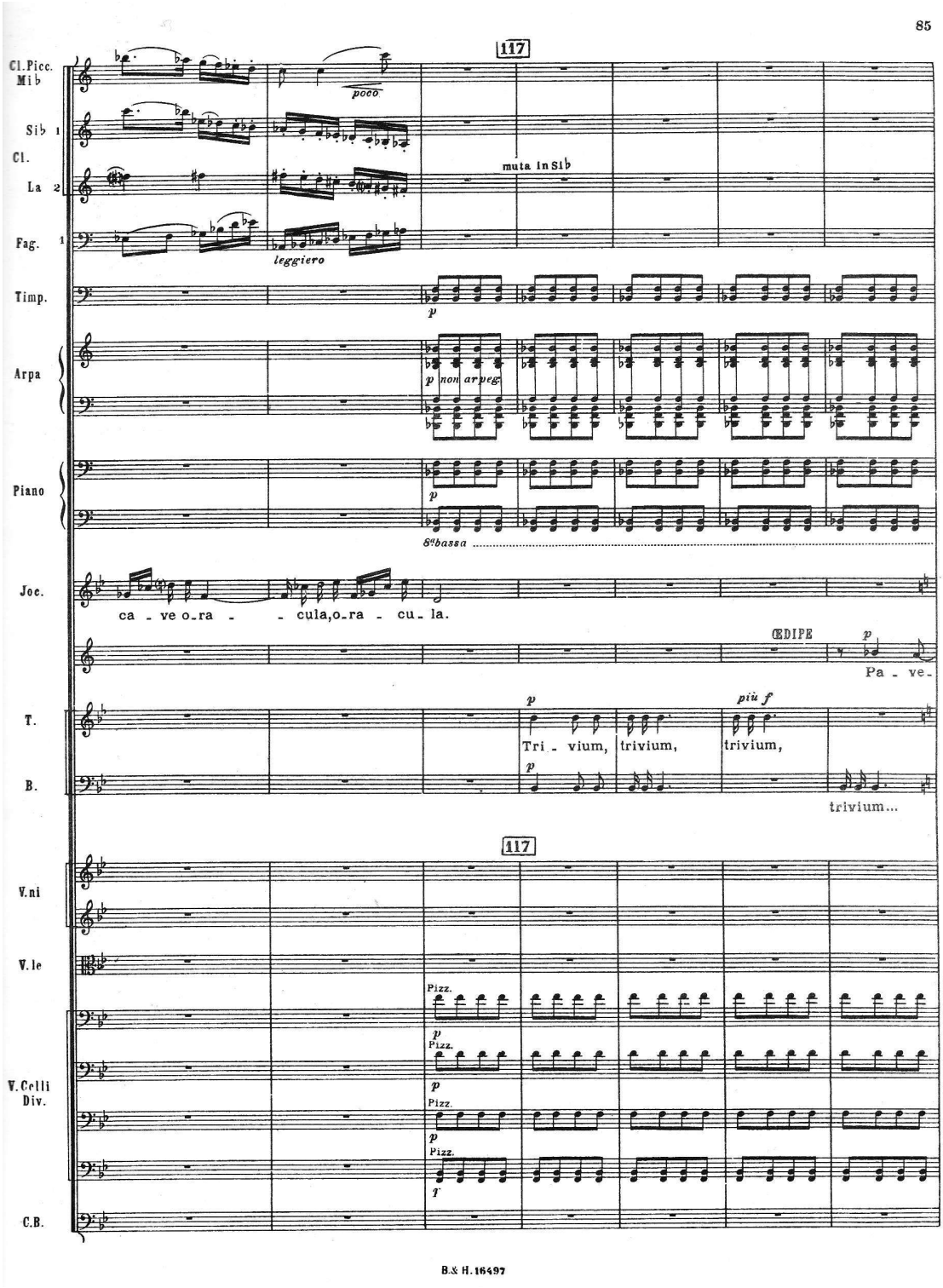
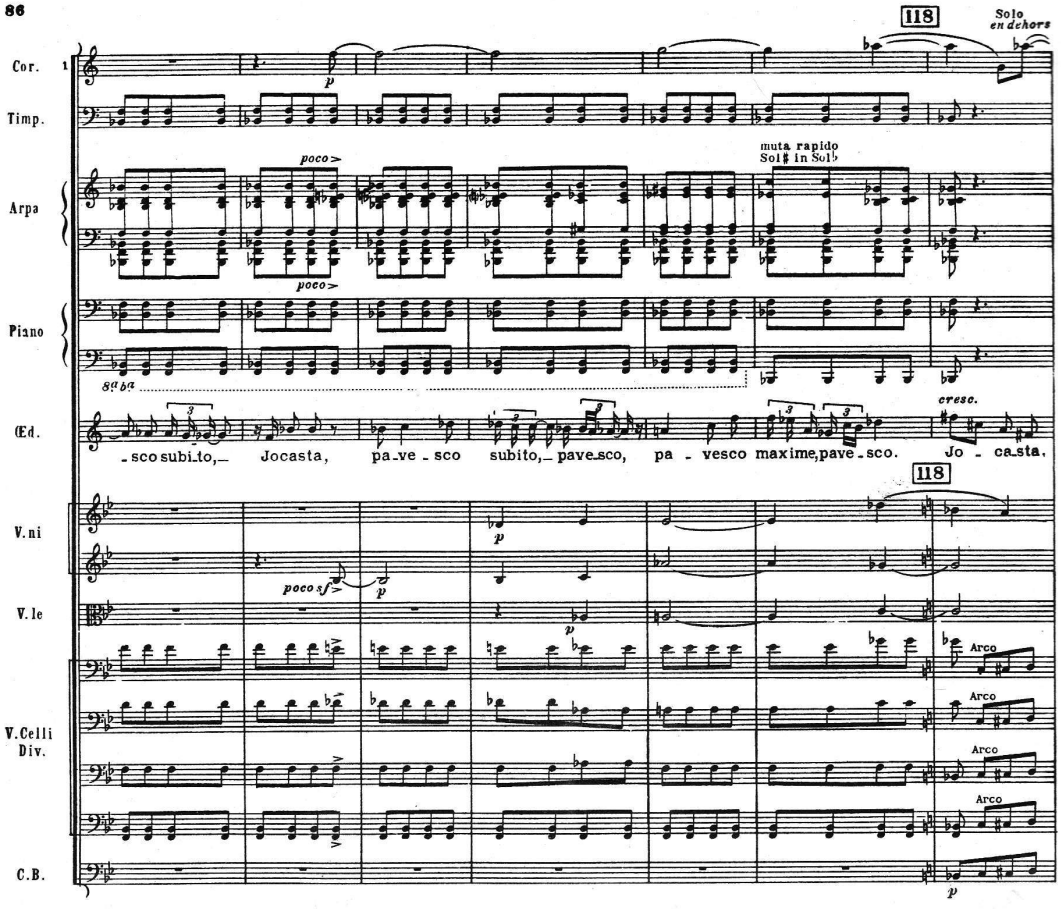
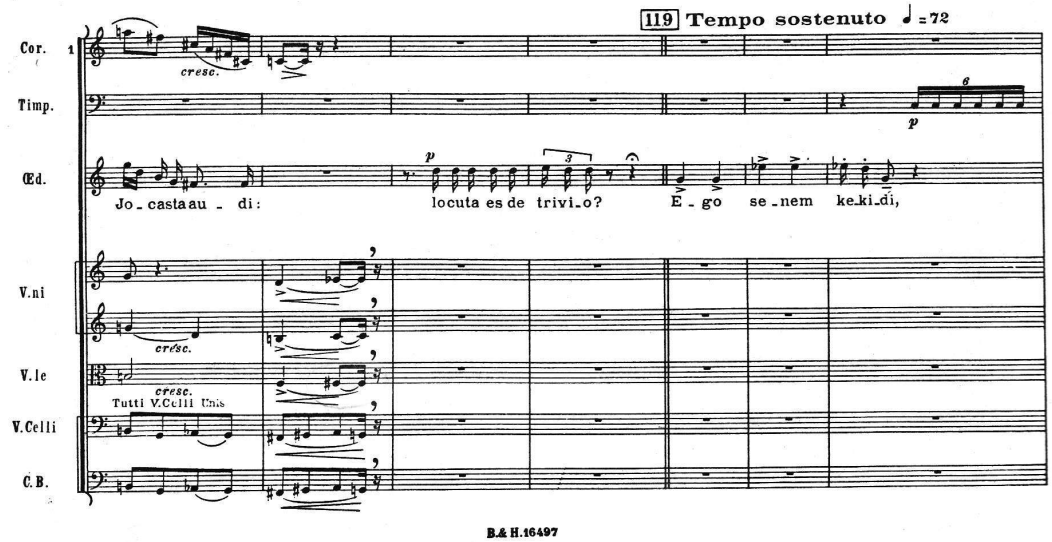
89 Bauschatz, 154.
90 Ibid., 156.
91 Sessions, 10.

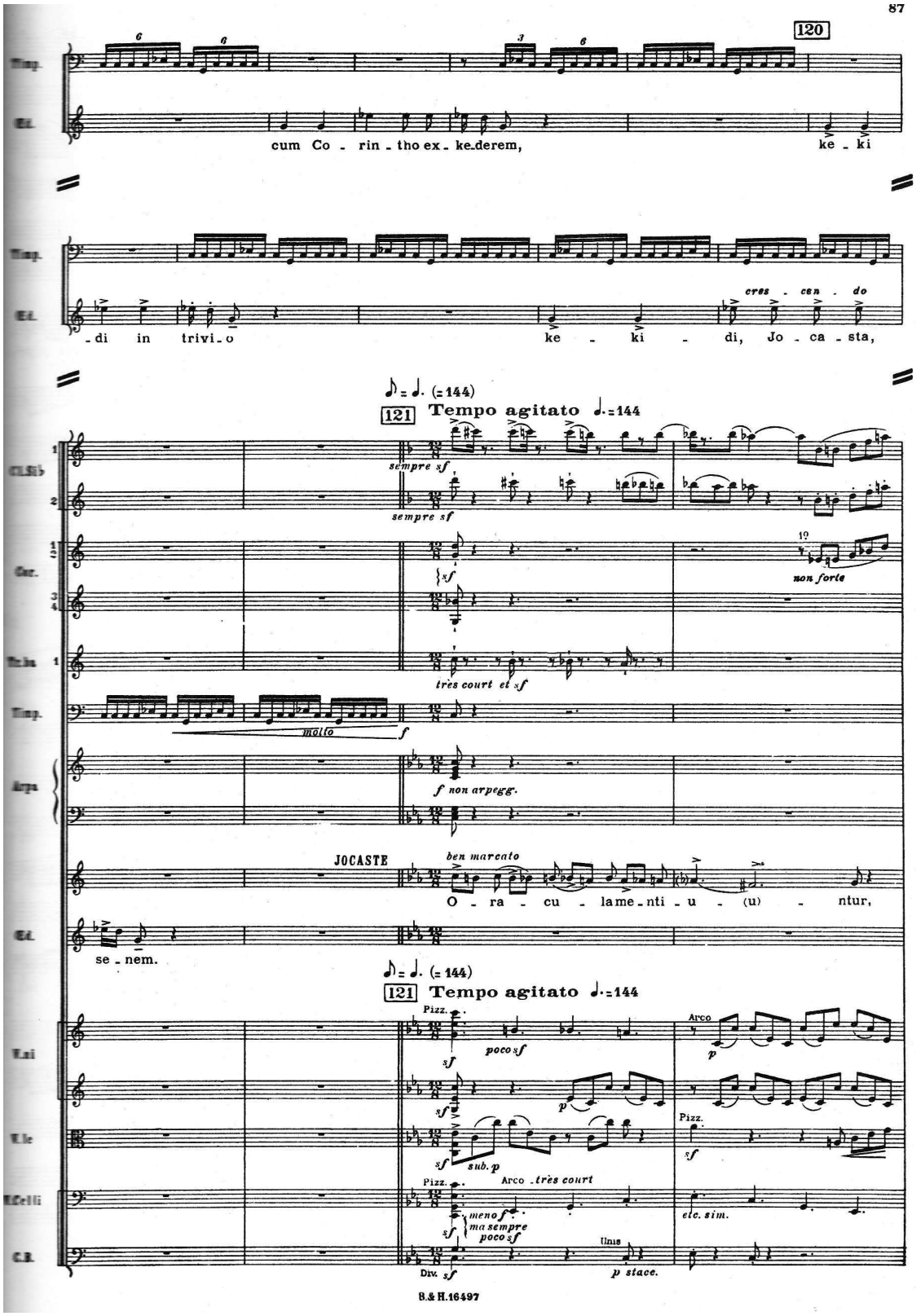
distilled drama. *Oedipus* also contains distinctly French sensibilities of the interwar period, a detachment mostly associated with neoclassicism at large, but sprung from post-war sentiments. This *Oedipus* has no depth; he is a plane, as is the entire drama and stage presentation. The only depth lay in the musical language, which with the flattening of the overall drama, becomes its vehicle. The past dramaturgical and musical forms, structures, and language are reduced to their bare elements then abstracted in order to present a modern, architectural rendering that is separated from its own sources. To complete the opening quote by Roger Sessions: "The power of *Oedipus* never depends on effects of association."

Appendix A: Excerpt—Nos. 117-121

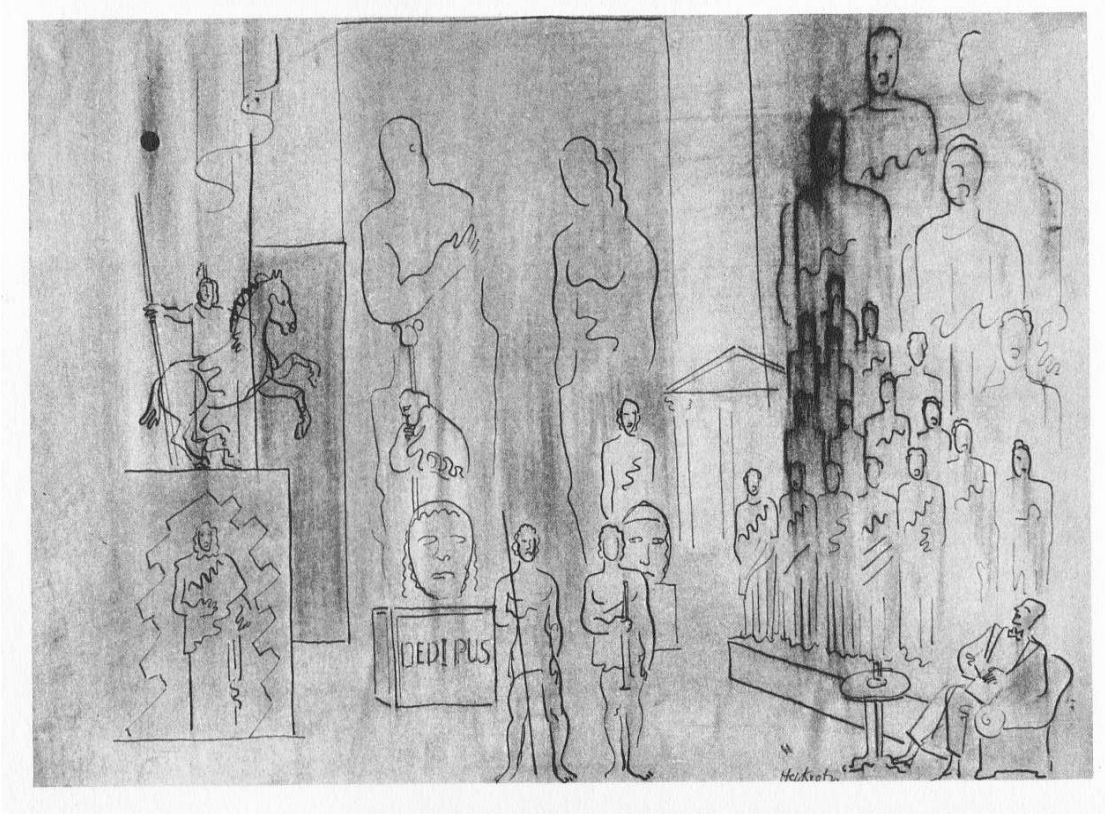



118
Solo
en dehors
Cor. 1
Timp.
Arpa
poco>
muta rapido
Sol♯ in Sol♭
Piano
8va bca
Œd.
cresc.
-sco subi-to,— Jocasta, pa-ve-sco subito,— pave-sco, pa-vesco maxime, pave-sco. Jo-ca-sta,
118
V.ni
V.le
poco sf
Arco
V.Celli
Div.
C.B.


119 Tempo sostenuto ♩=72
Cor. 1
cresc.
Timp.
Œd.
Jo-casta au-di: locuta es de trivi-o? E-go se-nem ke-ki-di,
V.ni
V.le
cresc.
Tutti V.Celli Uns
V.Celli
C.B.


120
Timp.
Ét.
cum Co - rin - tho ex - ke-derem,
ke - ki
-di in trivi-o
ke - ki - di, Jo - ca - sta,
cres - cen - do
♪ = ♩. (= 144)
121 Tempo agitato ♩. = 144
Cl.Sib
Bsn.
Trba
sempre sf
non forte
très court et sf
molto
f non arpegg.
JOCASTE
ben marcato
O - ra - cu - lame-nti - u - (u) - ntur,
se-nem.
Vni
Vle
Vlcelli
C.B.
Pizz.
poco sf
Arco
sub. p
Arco très court
meno f
ma sempre poco sf
etc. sim.
Unis
Div.
p stacc.

Appendix B



Hein Heckroth, Décor of *Oedipus Rex* (1929-30): pen, ink, tempura[92]

92 The New York Public Library, *Stravinsky and the Theatre: A Catalogue of Décor and Costume Designs for Stage Productions of His Works, 1910-1962* (New York, 1963), 42.

Appendix C

Mikhail Larionov, “Blue Rayonism”, or “Portrait of a Fool” 1912. Oil on canvas, 65 x 70 cm. Tchekinsky Collection, Paris.

Natalia Goncharova, “Cats” 1913. Oil on canvas, 85.1 x 85.7 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 57.1484. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

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